Bull-Dog Drummond

The Adventures of a Demobilized Officer Who Found Peace Dull

By Cyril McNeile "Sapper"

"DON'T LAUGH!"

Synopsis.—In December, 1918, four men gathered in a hotel in Berne and heard one of the quartet, Carl Peterson, outline a plan to paralyze Great Britain and at the same time seize world power. The other three, Hocking, American, and Steineman and Von Gratz, Germans, all millionaires, agree to the scheme, providing another man, Hiram Potts, an American, is taken in. Capt. Hugh (Bull-Dog) Drummond, a retired officer, advertises for work that will give him excitement, signing "X10." As a result he meets Phyllis Benton, a young woman who answered his ad. She tells him of strange murders and robberies by a band headed by Carl Peterson and Henry Lakington. She fears her father is involved. Drummond goes to The Larches, Miss Benton's home, next door to The Elms, Peterson's place. During the night Drummond leaves The Larches and explores The Elms. He discovers Lakington and Peterson using a thumbscrew on Potts, who signs a paper. Drummond rescues Potts and takes him to his own home. He also gets half the paper, torn in the struggle. Peterson visits Drummond, departing with a threat to return and recover Potts and also the torn paper which Potts signed. The band abduct Hugh and a friend he has substituted for Potts and take them to The Elms. Peterson is furious over the mistake.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

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A fixed determination to know what lay in that sinister brain replaced his temporary indecision. Events up to date had moved so quickly that he had hardly had time to get his bearings; even now the last twenty-four hours seemed almost a dream. And as he looked at the broad back and massive head of the man at the window, and from him to the girl idly smoking on the sofa, he smiled a little grimly. He had just remembered the thumbscrew of the preceding evening. Assuredly the demobilized officer who found peace dull was getting his money's worth; and Drummond had a shrewd suspicion that the entertainment was only just beginning.

A sudden sound outside in the garden made him look up quickly. He saw the white gleam of a shirt front, and the next moment a man pushed open the window and came unsteadily into the room. It was Mr. Benton, and quite obviously he had been seeking consolation in the bottle.

"Have you got him?" he demanded thickly, steadying himself with a hand on Peterson's arm.

"I have not," said Peterson shortly, eyeing the swaying figure in front of him contemptuously. "For heaven's sake, sit down, man, before you fall down." He pushed Benton roughly into a chair, and resumed his impassive stare into the darkness.

The girl took not the slightest notice of the new arrival, who gazed stupidly at Drummond across the table.

"We seem to be moving in an atmosphere of cross-purposes, Mr. Benton," said the soldier affably. "I hope your daughter is quite well."

"Er—quite, thank you," muttered the other.

"Tell her, will you, that I propose to call on her before returning to London tomorrow."

With his hands in his pockets, Peterson was regarding Drummond from the window.

"You propose leaving us tomorrow, do you?" he said quietly.

Drummond stood up.

"I ordered my car for ten o'clock," he answered. "I am quite sure that I shall be more useful to Mr. Peterson at large than I am cooped up here. I might even lead him to this hidden treasure which he thinks I've got."

"You will do that, all right," remarked Peterson. "But at the moment I was wondering whether a little persuasion now—might not give me all the information I require more quickly and with less trouble."

A fleeting vision of a mangled, pulplike thumb flashed across Hugh's mind; once again he heard that hideous cry, half animal, half human, which had echoed through the darkness the preceding night, and for an instant his breath came a little faster. Then he smiled, and shook his head.

"I think you are rather too good a judge of human nature to try anything so foolish," he said thoughtfully. "You see, unless you kill me, which I don't think would suit your book, you might find explanations a little difficult tomorrow."

For a while there was silence in the room, broken at length by a short laugh from Peterson.

"For a young man, truly your perspicacity is great," he remarked. "Irma, is the blue room ready? If so, tell Luigi to show Captain Drummond to it."

"I will show him myself," she answered, rising.

Hugh saw a look of annoyance pass over Peterson's face as he turned to follow the girl, and it struck him that that gentleman was not best pleased at the turn of events. Then the door closed, and he followed his guide up the stairs.

The girl opened the door of a room and switched on the light. Then she faced him smiling, and Hugh looked at her steadily. "Tell me, you ugly man," she murmured, "why you are such a fool."

Hugh smiled, and as has been said before, Hugh's smile transformed his face.

"I must remember that opening," he said. "It establishes a basis of intimacy at once, doesn't it?"

She swayed a little toward him, and then, before he realized her intention, she put a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't you understand," she whispered fiercely, "that they'll kill you?" She peered past him half fearfully, and then turned to him again. "Go, you idiot, go—while there's time. Get out of it—go abroad; do anything—but don't fool round here."

"It seems a cheerful household," remarked Hugh with a smile. "May I ask why you're all so concerned about me? Your estimable father gave me the same advice yesterday morning."

"Don't ask why," she answered feverishly, "because I can't tell you. Only you must believe that what I say is the truth—you must. It's just possible that if you go now and tell them where you've hidden the American you'll be all right. But if you don't—" Her hand dropped to her side suddenly. "Breakfast will be at nine, my Hugh: until then, au revoir."

He turned as she left the room, a little puzzled by her change of tone. Standing at the top of the stairs was Peterson, watching them both in silence. . . .

TWO.

In the days when Drummond had been a platoon commander he had done many dangerous things. The ordinary joys of the infantry subaltern's life—such as going over the top, and carrying out raids—had not proved sufficient for his appetite. He had specialized in peculiar stunts of his own: stunts over which he was singularly reticent; stunts over which his men formed their own conclusions, and worshiped him accordingly.

But Drummond was no fool, and he had realized the vital importance of fitting himself for these stunts to the best of his ability. Enormous physical strength is a great asset, but it carries with it certain natural disadvantages. In the first place, its possessor is frequently clumsy: Hugh had practiced in France till he could move over ground without a single blade of grass rustling. Van Dyck—a Dutch trapper—had first shown him the trick, by which a man goes forward on his elbows like a snake, and is here one moment and gone the next, with no one the wiser.

Again, its possessor is frequently slow: Hugh had practiced in France till he could kill a man with his bare hands in a second. Oiaki—a Japanese—had first taught him two or three of the secrets of his trade, and in the intervals of resting behind the lines he had perfected them until it was even money whether the Jap or he would win in a practice bout.

And there were nights in No Man's Land when his men would hear strange sounds, and knowing that Drummond was abroad on his wanderings, would

"Tell Me, You Ugly Man," She Murmured, "Why You Are Such a Fool."

peer eagerly over the parapet into the desolate torn-up waste in front. But they never saw anything, even when the green ghostly flares went hissing up into the darkness and the shadows danced fantastically. All was silent and still; the sudden shrill whimper was not repeated.

Perhaps a patrol coming back would report a German, lying huddled in a shellhole, with no trace of a wound, but only a broken neck; perhaps the patrol never found anything. But whatever the report, Hugh Drummond only grinned and saw to his men's breakfast. Which is why there are in England today quite a number of civilians who acknowledge only two rulers—the King and Hugh Drummond. And they would willingly die for either.

The result on Drummond was not surprising; as nearly as a man may he was without fear. And when the idea came to him as he sat on the edge of his bed thoughtfully pulling off his shoes, no question of the possible risk entered into his mind. To explore the house seemed the most natural thing in the world, and with characteristic brevity he summed up the situation as it struck him.

"They suspect me anyhow: in fact, they know I took Potts. Therefore, even if they catch me passage creeping, I'm no worse off than I am now. And I might find something of interest. Therefore, carry on, brave heart."

It was dark in the passage outside as he opened the door of his room and crept toward the top of the stairs. The collar of his brown lounge coat was turned up, and his stocking feet made no sound on the heavy pile carpet. Like a huge shadow he vanished into the blackness, feeling his way forward with the uncanny instinct that comes from much practice. Every now and then he paused and listened intently, but the measured ticking of the clock below and the occasional creak of a board alone broke the stillness.

To the left lay the room in which he had spent the evening, and Drummond turned to the right. As he had gone up to bed he had noticed a door screened by a heavy curtain which he thought might be the room Phyllis Benton had spoken of—the room where Henry Lakington kept his ill-gotten treasures. He felt his way along the wall, and at length his hand touched the curtain—only to drop it again at once. From close beside him had come a sharp, angry hiss. . . .

He stepped back a pace and stood rigid, staring at the spot from which the sound had seemed to come—but he could see nothing. Then he leaned forward and once more moved the curtain. Instantly it came again, sharper and angrier than before.

Hugh passed a hand over his forehead and found it damp. Germans he knew, and things on two legs, but what was this that hissed so viciously in the darkness? At length he determined to risk it, and drew from his pocket a tiny electric torch. Holding it well away from his body, he switched on the light. In the center of the beam, swaying gracefully to and fro, was a snake. For a moment he watched it, fascinated as it spat at the light angrily; he saw the flat hood where the vicious head was set on the upright body; then he switched off the torch and retreated rather faster than he had come.

"A convivial household," he muttered to himself through lips that were a little dry. "A hooded cobra is an unpleasing pet."

Hugh had just determined to reconnoiter the curtained doorway again to see if it was possible to circumvent the snake, when a low chuckle came distinctly to his ears from the landing above.

He flushed angrily in the darkness. There was no doubt whatever as to the human origin of that laugh, and Hugh suddenly realized that he was making the most profound fool of himself. To be laughed at by some dirty swine whom he could strangle in half a minute—was impossible. His fists clenched, and he swore softly under his breath. Then as silently as he had come down, he commenced to climb the stairs again. He had a hazy idea that he would like to hit something—hard.

There were nine stairs in the first half of the flight, and it was as he stood on the fifth that he again heard the low chuckle. At the same instant something whizzed past his head so low that it almost touched his hair, and there was a clang on the wall beside him. He ducked instinctively, and regardless of noise raced up the remaining stairs, on all-fours. His jaw was set like a vise, his eyes were blazing; in fact, Hugh Drummond was seeing red.

He paused when he reached the top, crouching in the darkness. Close to him he could feel some one else, and holding his breath, he listened. Then he heard the man move—only the very faintest sound—but it was enough. Without a second's thought he sprang, and his hands closed on human flesh. He laughed gently; then he fought in silence.

His opponent was strong above the average, but after a minute he was like a child in Hugh's grasp. He choked once or twice and muttered something; then Hugh slipped his right hand gently onto the man's throat. His fingers moved slowly round, his thumb adjusted itself lovingly, and the man felt his head being forced back irresistibly. He gave one strangled cry, and then the pressure relaxed. . . .

"One half-inch more, my gentle humorist," Hugh whispered in his ear, "and your neck would have been broken. As it is, it will be very stiff for some days. Another time—don't laugh. It's dangerous."

Then, like a ghost, he vanished along the passage in the direction of his own room.

THREE.

At eight o'clock the next morning a burly looking ruffian brought in some hot water and a cup of tea. As he pulled up the blinds the light fell full on his battered, rugged face, and suddenly Hugh sat up in bed and stared at him.

"Good Lord!" he cried, "aren't you Jem Smith?"

The man swung round like a flash and glared at the bed.

"Wot the 'ell 'as that got to do wiv you?" he snarled, and then his face changed. "Why, strike me pink, if it ain't young Drummond."

Hugh grinned.

"Right in one, Jem. What in the name of fortune are you doing in this outfit? Given up the game?"

"It give me up, when that cross-eyed son of a gun Young Baxter fought that cross down at 'Oxton. Gawd! if I could get the swine—just once again—s'welp me, I'd—" Words failed the ex-bruiser; he could only mutter.

Hugh smiled. "By the way, has anyone got a stiff neck in the house this morning?"

"Stiff neck!" echoed the man. "Strike me pink if that ain't funny—

He Laughed Gently; Then He Fought in Silence.

your asking, I mean. The bloke's sitting up in 'is bed swearing awful. Can't move 'is 'ead at all."

"And who, might I ask, is the bloke?" said Drummond.

"Why, Peterson, o' course. 'Oo else? Breakfast at nine."

The door closed behind him, and Hugh lit a cigarette thoughtfully. Most assuredly he was starting in style: Lakington's jaw one night, Peterson's neck the second, seemed a sufficiently energetic opening to the game for the veriest glutton. Then that cheerful optimism which was the envy of his friends asserted itself.

"Supposin' I'd killed 'em," he murmured, aghast. "Just supposin'. Why, the bally show would have been over, and I'd have had to advertise again."

Only Peterson was in the dining-room when Hugh came down. He had examined the stairs on his way, but he could see nothing unusual which would account for the thing which had whizzed past his head and clanged sullenly against the wall. Nor was there any sign of the cobra by the curtained door; merely Peterson standing in a sunny room behind a bubbling coffee-machine.

He turned politely toward his host, and paused in dismay. "Good heavens, Mr. Peterson, is your neck hurting you?"

"It is," answered Peterson grimly. "A nuisance, having a stiff neck. Makes every one laugh, and one gets no sympathy. Bad thing—laughter. . . . At times, anyway."

"Curiosity is a great deal worse, Captain Drummond. It was touch and go whether I killed you last night."

"I think I might say the same," returned Drummond.

"Yes and no," said Peterson. "From the moment you left the bottom of the stairs, I had your life in the palm of my hand. Had I chosen to take it, my young friend, I should not have had this stiff neck."

Hugh returned to his breakfast unconcernedly.

"Granted, laddie, granted. But had I not been of such a kindly and forbearing nature, you wouldn't have had it, either." He looked at Peterson critically. "I'm inclined to think it's a great pity I didn't break your neck while I was about it." Hugh sighed and drank some coffee. "I see that I shall have to do it some day, and probably Lakington's as well. . . . By the way, how is our Henry? I trust his jaw is not unduly inconveniencing him."

Peterson, with his coffee cup in his hand, was staring down the drive.

"Your car is a little early, Captain Drummond," he said at length. "However, perhaps it can wait two or three minutes while we get matters perfectly clear. I should dislike you not knowing where you stand." He turned round and faced the soldier. "You have deliberately, against my advice, elected to fight me and the interests I represent. So be it. From now on the gloves are off. You embarked on this course from a spirit of adventure, at the instigation of the girl next door. She, poor little fool, is concerned over that drunken waster—her father. She asked you to help her—you agreed, and, amazing though it may seem, up to now you have scored a certain measure of success. I admit it, and I admire you for it. I apologize now for having played the fool with you last night; you're the type of man whom one should kill outright—or leave alone."

He set down his coffee cup and carefully snipped the end off a cigar.

"You are also the type of man who will continue on the path he has started. You are completely in the dark; you have no idea whatever what you are up against." He smiled grimly, and turned abruptly on Hugh. "You fool—you stupid young fool. Do you really imagine that you can beat me?"

The soldier rose and stood in front of him.

"I have a few remarks of my own to make," he answered, "and then we might consider the interview closed. I ask nothing better than that the gloves should be off—though with your filthy methods of fighting, anything you touch will get very dirty. As you say, I am completely in the dark as to your plans; but I have a pretty shrewd idea what I'm up against. Men who can employ a thumbscrew on a poor defenseless brute seem to me to be several degrees worse than an aboriginal cannibal, and therefore if I put you down as one of the lowest types of degraded criminal I shall not be very wide of the mark. There's no good you snarling at me, you swine; it does everybody good to hear some home truths—and don't forget it was you who pulled off the gloves."

Drummond lit a cigarette; then his merciless eyes fixed themselves again on Peterson.

"There is only one thing more," he continued. "You have kindly warned me of my danger; let me give you a word of advice in my turn. I'm going to fight you; if I can, I'm going to beat you. Anything that may happen to me is part of the game. But if anything happens to Miss Benton during the course of operations, then, as surely as there is a God above, Peterson, I'll get at you somehow and murder you with my own hands."

For a few moments there was silence, and then with a short laugh Drummond turned away. "Shall we meet again soon?" He paused at the door and looked back.

Peterson was still standing by the table, his face expressionless. "Very soon, indeed, young man," he said quietly. "Very soon indeed. . . ."

Hugh stepped out into the warm sunshine and spoke to his chauffeur.

"Take her out into the main road, Jenkins," he said, "and wait for me outside the entrance to the next house. I shan't be long."

Then he strolled through the garden toward the little wicket-gate that led to The Larches. Phyllis! The thought of her was singing in his heart to the exclusion of everything else. Just a few minutes with her; just the touch of her hand, the faint smell of the scent she used—and then back to the game.

He had almost reached the gate, when, with a sudden crashing in the undergrowth, Jem Smith blundered out into the path. His naturally ruddy face was white, and he stared round fearfully.

"Gawd! sir," he cried, "mind out. 'Ave yer seen it?"

"Seen what, Jem?" asked Drummond.

"That there brute. 'E's escaped; and if 'e meets a stranger—" He left the sentence unfinished, and stood listening. From somewhere behind the house came a deep-throated, snarling roar; then the clang of a padlock shooting home in metal, followed by a series of heavy thuds as if some big animal was hurling itself against the bars of a cage.

"They've got it," muttered Jem.

"You seem to have a nice little crowd of pets about the house," remarked Drummond, putting a hand on the man's arm as he was about to move off. "What was that docile creature we've just heard calling to its young?"

The ex-pugilist looked at him sullenly.

"Never you mind, sir; it ain't no business of yours. An' if I was you, I wouldn't make it your business to find out."

A moment later he had disappeared into the bushes, and Drummond was left alone. Assuredly a cheerful household, he reflected; just the spot for a rest-cure. Then he saw a figure on the lawn of the next house which banished everything else from his mind; and opening the gate, he walked eagerly toward Phyllis Benton.

"Long live the Brotherhood!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wood Averts Evil.

There are numerous curious or superstitious beliefs regarding fragrant woods, says the American Forestry Magazine. The Burmese have a superstition that beams of balances should be made of the Thitman or prince of woods (Podearpus nerufolia), while a peg of it driven into a house post or boats will avert evil.

Soup Sole.

A little girl was annoyed by her sister's inhalation of her soup. She became restless and finally in spite of elders present at the table, she said: "I hear you enjoy your soup Elsie."—Lawrence Telegram.

Her Escort Decamped.

When I was about fourteen years old, all the older girls were accompanied home after church by some boy friend, so when one of the boys asked, "May I see you home?" I of course said "yes," I walked along, feeling quite grown up. When passing a house where there was an extremely vicious dog, to my horror out came the beast growling—and around on the safe side went my escort. I settled the dog with the toe of my slipper—and saw myself home after that!—Exchange.

Annoying.

The lady of the house sat reading in her drawing room, when the nursemaid rushed in, exclaiming:

"Oh! ma'am the twins have fallen in the well!"

"How annoying!" said her mistress, as she languidly changed her position. "Go into the library—very gently, so as not to disturb Fido—and get me the last number of the Modern Mothers' Magazine. It contains an article on 'How to Bring Up Children!'"

Nerve.

"That's what I call downright humiliating," said Mrs. B.

"What has happened?" inquired her husband.

"The neighbors who recently moved next door are going to have company, so they want to borrow our drawing room rug. I let them have it.. In a little while they came back and said they didn't think it was handsome enough to go with their furniture, and could I lend them the money to buy a new one."

Educating the public is no great task if it is anything in which the movies can educate them.

Don't let your automobile be your utter master. Walk a little.